

## Pilgrimage Through the Watchtower

### Chapter 7: Born Again!



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## Chapter 7: Born Again!

It was now early October of 1984. I was on a plane, on my way to Los Angeles for a business trip. I was past the midway point in my study, and the new things that my Watchtower-encrusted mind was learning from the Bible were beginning to trickle down into my heart.

We were soaring over Ohio at 35,000 feet. As I looked out the window, a city far below caught my eye, and something welled up inside me. "Jesus died for all those people down there," I thought to myself, "not just Jehovah's Witnesses." I thought of my own arrogance as I had gone from door to door preaching that no one could be saved who had rejected the Watchtower, God's organization. But now things were looking very different. It really wasn't *we* who were important, not the Watchtower, not any man, but *Christ*. It was *Jesus* who had died. It was *Jesus* who calls His sheep by name (John 10:3). And there were people down there, humble, simple people, whom Jesus dearly loved, that I had cast off as "goats," not fit to be God's people. Yes, things were beginning to look very different! Jesus and His work were taking on wonderful new meaning.

It was on this trip to Los Angeles that I first thought that I might eventually become a born-again Christian. I had amassed hundreds of Scripture verses, most of which contradicted the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses, and I was quickly approaching the point where I'd have to begin drawing conclusions. Also, I had begun having various "coincidences" occur in my daily life that made me wonder whether the Father was somehow taking a special interest in drawing me to Jesus (John 6:44).

I stayed at a hotel in Santa Monica, and spent Saturday at the beach, studying as usual. On my walk back to the hotel, I was about to pass by an old man on a street corner, when he called to me. "Hey! Is that a Bible you've got there?" I stopped in my tracks. "Yes, it is," I said. He came over to me. "Praise the Lord, brother!" I showed him my Companion Bible. "Have you ever read Scofield?" he asked. I answered, "No." I'd never heard of Scofield. "You have to read Scofield!" he said. "Scofield's the best!" I had no idea what he was talking about. As I turned to leave, he handed me a tract, saying again, "Read Scofield!" "Okay," I said, and walked back to the hotel. "What a crazy old man," I thought to myself. Back in my

room, I pulled out the tract that he had given me and looked it over. It had color comic book pictures of people burning in hell, etc. I'd been given many of these by Christians over the years. As usual, I deposited it in the trash.

A couple of weeks later, my brother Brad and I were in a Christian book store in Fishkill, New York. As I was looking over the Bibles, one of them caught my eye. *Scofield*? Hmm. I suddenly remembered the old man on the street corner. I picked up the *Oxford NIV Scofield Study Bible*. I was amused, as I had forgotten all about the old man. The Bible looked interesting; it was full of references and study notes. I purchased it and brought it home. I added "Scofield" to my library of reference books, and referred to him often throughout the remainder of my study.

My return flight from California was a milestone in my pilgrimage. I had finished my work in Los Angeles, and had spent the last few days of my trip in the San Francisco Bay area. I boarded a plane at the San Francisco airport and was soon heading back to New York.

I introduced myself to the woman sitting next to me on the plane. "My name's Ginny," she said. "My daughter was going to be flying with me today, but she had to cancel out at the last minute, so it looks like you got her seat." We exchanged some small talk, and I found myself enjoying her company.

A half hour or so into the five-hour flight, after dozing just a bit to relax, I opened my eyes, getting ready to continue work on my study. I looked over at Ginny. She had her tray table open, and was writing in a workbook of some kind. Then I looked and saw, also open on her tray table, a *Bible*! From time to time she would look up a Scripture verse or two in her *Bible*, then continue writing again in her workbook.

My heart began pounding. "Jehovah, what's going on here?" I prayed silently. I wanted so badly to continue on in my study; I was about ready to begin drawing conclusions, and I couldn't afford to waste precious time. But I couldn't study now; Ginny would surely notice what I was doing and ask me about it. But I couldn't tell her! What if it turned out that Jehovah's Witnesses were right after all? What kind of witness would I be giving Ginny if I were to let her know anything about the terrible battle that I was going through? One of Jehovah's Witnesses with *doubts*? No, I couldn't risk it.

Oh, but I wanted to talk to her! I had kept my study secret for over four months now, and it was tearing me apart inside. I had no one on earth that I could talk about it with. Talking with any other Jehovah's Witness was out, since even my

closest friends would be required to turn me in to the elders if they heard any "apostate" ideas from me. I would then be quickly disfellowshipped, cut off forever from my friends and from my brother Steve. Talking with Christians was out, because for them to hear of a Jehovah's Witness with doubts would be a horrible reproach upon Jehovah's name, if it was to turn out that Jehovah's Witnesses did have the truth after all.

After three hours of this torture, Ginny and I were again exchanging small talk. "Where are you headed once you get to New York?" I asked her. "Peekskill," she said. "Hey, what a coincidence!" I said. "I'm going to Hyde Park." Hyde Park is about thirty miles north of Peekskill, which in turn is fifty miles north of New York City. "How are you getting up there?" I asked. "I'm taking the Hudson Valley Transporter," she answered. "Wow! Me too!" We both marveled that the two of us, sitting next to each other on the plane from San Francisco, would be taking the same shuttle service to our respective upstate towns.

Ginny put away her books, and for the last hour of the flight the two of us sat in silent contemplation. My heart was aching now. Oh, how I wanted to talk to her! But no, I couldn't! There was just no way. The stakes were too high. But then I had an idea.

"Jehovah," I prayed silently, my heart thumping all the more, "I would so much like to talk with Ginny about you and about the Bible. You know all things, my God. You know that I love you, that I'd never do anything to bring your great and holy Name into reproach. Therefore I've resolved in my heart not to say a word to her about you or about my study. But, Jehovah, if by some chance she has something to share with me, then let her say something first. This situation is in your hands, Jehovah. If she says nothing, then I'll say nothing. But if she initiates a conversation about you, I'll understand that you have, in the light of this prayer, allowed her to do it, and that it is okay for me to talk to her." I felt safe with this prayer. Since I had said nothing about and had shown no interest in her Bible study, there was no reason in the world why she should start talking to me about God, except by His prompting. The situation was safely in God's hands.

We deplaned in New York and made our way to the baggage claim area. Standing together waiting for our bags to appear on the carousel, I again commented to Ginny what a coincidence it was that the two of us would be traveling upstate on the same shuttle. Then she hit me with a bombshell. "I don't think it's a coincidence," she said. My heart began pounding again. "What do you mean?" I asked, bracing myself for her answer. "Since I've come to know the

Lord," she said, "I've come to understand that nothing happens by coincidence. There's a reason why my daughter canceled out at the last minute. There's a reason why we sat together on the plane, and there's a reason why we'll be traveling together on the shuttle. I think the Lord wants me to talk to you."

Well, that was it. God had opened the door, and I don't think anyone or anything in heaven or on earth could have shut it. "I'm one of Jehovah's Witnesses," I heard myself telling Ginny, "and I've been having some questions..." We sat on a bench in the baggage claim area, still waiting for our luggage. I pulled out my loose-leaf notebook, now almost two inches thick with study notes, and showed it to Ginny. "Now I know the Lord wants me to talk to you," she said as she dug into her carry-on bag and pulled out her Bible. Opening to Genesis 1:1, she began, "In the beginning *God* created the heavens and the earth...the *Spirit* of God was moving over the surface of the waters...Then *God said...*" And there on that bench and for the next three hours during our trip on the shuttle, she spoke to me and reasoned with me from the Word of God. As it turned out, Ginny was a Bible teacher from a small town east of San Francisco. We spoke freely during our bus trip, almost oblivious to the world around us. Looking back, the other people on the bus must have gotten a real earful!

Finally it was time for Ginny to exit the bus, and we said goodbye. Before stepping off, though, Ginny turned back and gave me a final admonition. "All I ask is that you give Jesus a chance in your life," she said. "I will," I called back, "I promise you that!"

After the trip, meetings at the Kingdom Hall were never the same. The first Sunday public talk was entitled, "Is God a Trinity?" After the talk and Watchtower study, one of the "Farm brothers" asked me, "Well, what did you think of the public talk?" "Typical," was my reply. I so badly wanted to tell this brother how poor the elder's talk really was, but "typical" was as strong as I dared be. If I was to be leaving Jehovah's Witnesses, I was going to leave of my own volition. Disfellowshipping for what they considered to be "apostasy" was not on my agenda. So I continued to keep my doubts to myself. And although I was still attending all of the required meetings, I found myself able to say "amen" to very few of the prayers offered by the brothers.

By mid-November of 1984, my study had reached its final size of 218 pages, covering 82 topics, and citing over 800 Scripture verses. I was beginning to draw conclusions. One topic at a time, I read, reread and reread again all the verses pertaining to the topic, eventually holding them all in my mind at once, finally arriving at the essence of what the

Scriptures taught on the subject, and writing the conclusion that I had come to at the end of the topic. I began with the simpler topics, and progressed on through the more difficult ones, leaving the three most difficult ones (for a Jehovah's Witness), the deity of Christ, the personality of the Holy Spirit, and the Trinity, for last. Since these three doctrines were so vitally connected, I thought it best to arrive at conclusions for them simultaneously. And the day finally did arrive for a decision on these also. First was the deity of Christ. After many days of painstaking reading, sorting, meditating, and resorting of over two hundred fifty verses pertaining to the deity of Christ alone, holding the essence of all these verses in mind at once, I finally was able to conclude without reservation that the Bible does in fact teach that Jesus Christ is God. Conclusions on the personality of the Holy Spirit and the Trinity soon followed, and then, quite unexpectedly, there was peace. The study was finished! But I still had yet to come to Jesus personally for salvation (John 5:39-40).

The last meeting that I attended at the Kingdom Hall was the Theocratic Ministry School and Service Meeting on Friday, November 16, 1984. Before the meeting began, I approached Bob, one of the elders with whom I had met at the Farm, the elder who had called me out to talk with him in his car, and requested a meeting with him and the other elders. He declined, saying that all the elders would be at the Kingdom Ministry School that weekend. He suggested that they might be able to meet with me the following weekend. "No," I said, "that will probably be too late. I'm considering disassociating myself from the Organization." Even then, Bob maintained that the weekend's plans were set and that I would have to wait. The meeting began.

My heart was on fire. The talk presented from the platform was pure blasphemy, and I had to strongly restrain myself from standing to my feet and rebuking the man giving the talk. Oh, how I wanted to preach Christ to these people! By halfway through the meeting, the shallowness, the emptiness, the blasphemy of it all had become just too much to bear. The time for my response to God's call had arrived.

I got up from my seat, exited the Kingdom Hall, and began the two-block walk back to my parents' house, where I was living. I started to jog, then to run. It would soon be all over.

I reached the house and went up to my room. Closing the door behind me, and kneeling beside my bed, for the first time in my life, I called upon the name of Jesus (1 Cor 1:2). I repented of my futile, failing life as a servant of the Watchtower. I renounced the Watchtower Society as a blasphemous, man-made counterfeit of Christianity. And, at

long last, I accepted Jesus, the *real* Jesus, as my all-sufficient Savior and Lord, and invited him into my heart.

I was in the truest sense leaving all things to gain Christ (Phil 3:8). I was saying goodbye to everything that was dear to me. The Watchtower theology, which I had given my all to, was now to me less than worthless. The Organization, for so long my sole source of spiritual food, would never again be there for me. Every one of my dear friends, whom I loved with my very soul, would never again be able to speak to me, nor even greet me, but instead only think and speak of me with utter disgust and contempt. Never again would I be able to even carry on a conversation with my brother Steve.

As I prayed I soon became aware that I was lopping off such a huge portion of my life that I might never recover from it. I began to feel that I might not emerge even from that prayer a sane person. But be that as it may, I was willing, even eager to give up also my emotional stability, shaky as it then was, to gain Christ.

I so badly wanted to be through with the whole ordeal that immediately upon rising from my prayer, I began to scribble out a disassociation letter. I still had time to get it down to the Kingdom Hall before everyone left for the night.

But just then there was a knock on my door. It was Brad. I explained to him what was going on, and he sensed the awesome, abysmal despair and chaos that was enveloping me. He felt the pain. So deep.

"It's done." Brad said, trying his best to console me. Then, after a few minutes of further discussion, Brad asked me, "Do you want to pray?" I answered, "Yes."

I was immediately struck with the difference in Brad's prayer compared with that which I had known as a Jehovah's Witness. We bowed our heads, and before beginning to speak, Brad waited in silence for a minute or so. And then as he spoke, I could almost *feel* the vital link that Brad had with his God, his only possible source of strength in this situation. And his prayer was so *personal!* As though his Father was right there in that room with us. After praying, my heart was calmed somewhat.

Steve then arrived home, as he was staying at our house for the weekend. He came up to my room and began accusing and chastising me for not submitting to the Society. He accused me of not fully searching out the Watchtower's explanations on all of the topics in my study. It meant nothing to Steve that I already knew them, having studied them exclusively and intensely for the past seven years. He said that I had not been

putting in enough "field service" hours, and therefore Jehovah's spirit had been withdrawn from me. He accused me of "bad association," referring to my association with Brad over the past few months. These accusations Steve continued heaping upon me for an hour or so, adding pain upon pain to my already precarious condition.

But somehow, Steve's accusations weren't quite as devastating as they were intended to be; there was something going on inside of me of which Steve could not be even remotely aware. My strength was no longer my own; my own strength had died with the "old man" who had been crucified earlier that evening. I witnessed for Christ.

A little later Brad and I were alone in the living room. We talked of God's love quietly in the dark. My heart was again comforted.

But sleep that night was fitful. My heart again sank into deep despair. "Who am I? What have I done?" I found myself wondering as I awoke time after time. "What is happening to me?" The battle was still raging! My mind reeled in Scriptural mayhem, verse after verse replaying themselves over and over again in my mind, pitting themselves one against another in endless, senseless anarchy. I felt as though I were desperately clutching at the fringes of reality. But amidst the furor, something else was also was happening inside me, and it was something that I'd never experienced before this time. As I awoke again and again that night, I detected as it were a small, quiet voice inside me repeating spontaneously, "Let God be praised. Let God be praised."

The following day was Saturday, and I was still in shock. Steve continued his reproof.

The next day, Sunday, instead of attending the meeting at the Kingdom Hall, I went for a ride on my motorcycle. Though it was a cool November day, the sun was out, and I needed to get outside for awhile.

After a short ride I found myself at the elementary school that I had attended in fifth and sixth grades. I turned off my bike at the rear of the school, and walked around the playground for awhile. I remembered my childhood there, and I thought of the happy, simple life that I had known then. I sat on the edge of a large sandbox, opened my pocket-sized New Testament, and read through the book of Galatians. Freedom in Christ! I saw how distressed Paul was that his brethren had been allowing themselves to be held in bondage to other men, and how free and simple genuine Christian life really was. I stood up, put the little New Testament back in my pocket, and looked up to heaven. Romans 8:15 came to my mind: "For

you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!'" I pulled out my New Testament again and read the next verse: "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." My eyes flooded with tears. That verse was talking to *me!* The Society had no part in this matter. God Himself was my Father, Jesus Christ, who had taken all my sins upon His own body and died for me (1 Pet 2:24), was my only Lord and Savior (Jude 1:4), and the Holy Spirit had come to dwell with me and *in* me forever (John 14:16-17)! I had been born again!

I got back on my motorcycle and continued my ride. After fifteen minutes or so, I was riding past a building in Clinton Corners with lots of cars in back, and a sign out front caught my eye. "Evangelical Free Church." "Hey," I thought to myself, "isn't that Brad's church?" I had never been there before, and my happening on it by "accident" caught me off guard. Ginny's words rang in my ears, "Since I've come to know the Lord..." I pulled over onto the opposite side of the road and studied the building for awhile. I wondered whether there were really demons inside, as the Watchtower had taught us. Or might God have something in store for me there? I saw Brad's motorcycle parked next to the building. "Let God's will be done," I said to myself as I motored back onto the road and headed for home.

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